

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE BRIEFERS: COLONEL JULIUS SMITH, PAST CONFLICT REPATRIATION BRANCH, U.S. ARMY; SHARI LAWRENCE, DEPUTY PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER FOR HUMAN RESOURCES COMMAND; CAROLYN FLOYD, CHIEF, SOUTHEAST ASIA BRANCH, PAST CONFLICT REPATRIATIONS BRANCH; LINDA BAUBLITZ, CHIEF, KOREA SECTION, PAST CONFLICT REPATRIATIONS BRANCH SUBJECT: THE MISSION OF THE PAST CONFLICT REPATRIATION BRANCH MODERATOR: CHARLES "JACK" HOLT, CHIEF, NEW MEDIA OPERATIONS, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS TIME: 11:00 A.M. EDT DATE: TUESDAY, MARCH 18, 2008

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MR. HOLT: Okay. All right. I believe we're ready here.

MS. LAWRENCE: Okay. Well, we can introduce everybody in the -- on our side of the house. I'm Shari Lawrence, Deputy PA for HRC.

COL. SMITH: I'm Lieutenant Colonel Julius Smith, chief of Past Conflict Repatriation Branch. MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you very much. I'm Jack Holt. I'll be your moderator here. On the line with us we've got Andrew Lubin from Military Observer, and also from the American Forces Press Service, we've got Kristen Noel and Jamie Findlater.

MS. LAWRENCE: Okay. And we've got two other people here as well.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

MS. FLOYD: I'm Carolyn Floyd, chief of the Southeast Asia Branch in Past Conflict.

MS. BAUBLITZ: I'm Linda Baublitz, and I'm the chief of the Korea section.

MS. LAWRENCE: (Inaudible.)

MR. HOLT: Okay. Thank you very much. Well --

MS. LAWRENCE: Are we ready?

MR. HOLT: Yes. Colonel Smith, if you're ready, we're ready for you. Do you have an opening statement for us, sir?

COL. SMITH: Yes. Yes, I do.

Good morning. I'm Lieutenant Colonel Julius Smith, chief of the Army's Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operations Center, Past Conflict Repatriation

Branch here in Alexandria, Virginia. I have with me two of the most important people in my office, Mrs. Linda Baublitz and Carolyn Floyd.

And before we begin, let me say that I appreciate your giving me the opportunity to speak with you. I have visited a few blog sites myself, and I know that many of our soldiers have also visited them. I'm hoping that our families with soldiers who are still unaccounted for from past conflicts are also visiting your blog sites.

I'd like to begin with a brief overview about our mission today and the Army's sincere commitment to execute the provisions of the commonly referred to as the Missing Persons Act. We serve as the Army's single point of contact for POW/MIA issues. We also conduct Army POW/MIA awareness. We conduct outreach and participate in the monthly Defense Prisoner of War/Missing in Action family member updates. We research, locate, and obtain family reference samples for the mitochondrial DNA database, which is held at the Armed Forces DNA Identification Lab, and to provide all available information to the soldier's primary next of kin.

The Army has a staff of 17 dedicated professionals that serve as your point of contact. Our top priority is to ensure that you receive the most up-to-date information available as well as explaining why something has not yet been accomplished. However, we require your help. We maintain a database of next of kin, which is obtained from the soldier's personnel records. This database assists us in keeping track of relatives we have been able to locate as well as those family members who have provided a DNA family reference sample. Most of these families were listed in the soldiers' records or were found utilizing a genealogist to research the last known contact. There are many more families that we have not been able to locate. You can help us keep our database updated. We're asking you to also periodically contact us -- I'm talking about the families that possibly may read this. If you know of someone who has a soldier still unaccounted for from a past conflict, ask them to call us at 1-800-892-2490. That's 1-800-892-2490. The information you provide can be the difference in an identification being made and a soldier coming home.

Just briefly about privacy: If you donate a sample of your mitochondrial DNA, you could rest assured that it will only be used for the purpose of assisting with an identification of a soldier still yet unaccounted for and will not be used for any other purpose or be released to other government agencies or any other organizations.

The scope of the Army's mission includes approximately 44,633 still unaccounted for from the past conflicts of the Southeast Asia war, the Korean War, the Cold War, and World War II. Let me place those numbers into some perspective for you -- just an overview by conflict. And what I want you to get out of these numbers are the families and DNA we still require to identify and return these soldiers to their families.

Southeast Asia, which incorporates Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam: We have 596 missing soldiers. We're in contact with 558 next of kin. We've collected 330 family reference samples, and the delta on that is approximately 38 families need to be located and approximately 266 family reference samples still need to be collected.

For Korea, we have 6,303 missing soldiers. We're in contact with 2,637 next of kin. We've collected 3,949 family reference samples. And the delta

there is approximately 3,666 families still need to be located, and approximately 2,354 family reference samples still need to be collected.

For World War II -- and these numbers are pretty daunting, and we just began the process of working with World War II a lot more -- we have 37,829 missing soldiers. We're in contact with 667 next of kin. We've collected 627 family reference samples. And that delta is approximately 37,162 families we still need to locate.

To achieve our goals for providing families the latest information, each of the services in conjunction with the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing in Action office conduct eight family updates a year around the country. We hold two annual updates -- that's Korea and Southeast Asia -- and we hold those in the Washington, D.C. area. We mail out invitations to family members in a radius of 250 to 300 miles from the central location of the update. Just as a note, approximately 15 to 20 percent of those invitations come back as undeliverable.

Your service Casualty Office is your single point of contact for assistance and information regarding unaccounted-for soldiers from past conflicts. For assistance or to pass on the contact information of a friend or family member who still needs answers to what happened to their soldier, contact the Mortuary Affairs and Casualty Support Division of the Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operations Center at the Army Human Resources Command. And again, that number is 1-800-892- 2490. Or you can e-mail us at [tapscper@conus.army.mil](mailto:tapscper@conus.army.mil). We can also be found on the web by going to the Army Human Resources Command website. Just look for PCRB or Past Conflict Repatriations Branch under the adjutant general directorate.

In closing, what I want you to take away from this discussion today is that America is keeping its promise to those who have served. We're the only country in the world that cares so much. To those family members we still need to find or still need to provide a family reference sample, help us keep that promise.

Thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much.

With us today, Lieutenant Colonel Julius Smith, the chief of the Past Conflicts Repatriation Branch of the U.S. Army's Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operations Center.

Andrew, why don't you get us started?

Q Great. Thank you.

Colonel Smith, Andrew Lubin here from The Military Observer.

COL. SMITH: Good morning.

Q Thank you for taking some time to talk to us today.

Sir, I've got a couple questions here -- kind of numbers related and also some bits and pieces. Can you break down the World War II figures for European versus Pacific theater? And do you find that the people who are -- are you making more of an effort for Vietnam because there is -- it's more

politically expedient or there's -- why is it such an effort on Vietnam versus, say, Korea and World War II?

COL. SMITH: The answer to your first question -- I would ask you to let me get back with you on those specific numbers for World War II.

Q Great. Thank you.

COL. SMITH: That breakout is -- it's actually a lot larger. The only number I gave you was the 44,000 that's associated with the Army.

Q Okay.

COL. SMITH: Actually there's probably somewhere around 88,000 that is broken out between all services for World War II.

Q Oh, I'm sorry -- you don't collect for all four services? I thought that you -- COL. SMITH: Just the United States Army.

Q I see. Okay. But there's still -- but there will still be some Army missing from New Guinea and from -- (inaudible) -- and from that whole area, I would assume.

COL. SMITH: That's correct.

Q Great. Okay. If you could send that to Mr. Holt later on, I would appreciate that.

COL. SMITH: Okay. And your other question was --

Q It seems to be you're making more of a huge effort for Vietnam mailings and the road shows and all versus Korea and World War II.

COL. SMITH: And actually I would tell you from the standpoint of the Army, when we have a family update that's located in a -- let's just say it would be in a location like Louisville -- and we go back to our family database and we mail out up to 250, 300 miles for all the families in that database.

Q Right.

COL. SMITH: And every one of them -- and that's all of the conflicts are reached out for at that time.

If you're talking about efforts based on what is done by the Joint Pacific Accounting Command or DPMO, right now North Korea we don't have a political opening to get into. World War II has been more of a -- it's by case-by-case finding, and as they show up, we go get them. And Vietnam -- well, Vietnam was -- I'm sorry. Linda?

MS. BAUBLITZ: Yeah. This is Linda Baublitz. It may seem that more effort was given to the Vietnam War, but there was a large difference in access to the countries. We had almost immediate access back into Vietnam, but North Korea -- we did not even start doing the joint recovery operations there until 1996.

Q Okay.

MS. BAUBLITZ: So it may have seemed like there was more of an effort for Vietnam, but we had more access into the country than North Korea.

Q Okay. I've been in -- this -- (inaudible) -- reports -- has the North Korean government been more cooperative the last year or so, or did that ebb and flow with their relations with the United States?

COL. SMITH: It's been kind of an ebb-and-flow, but yes, it seems as though some things are in the future going to be positive for more cooperation with North Korea. Q Okay, great. Thanks.

Jack, I've got more but, you know, Jamie and everybody else -- I don't want to monopolize everybody.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Well, Kristy?

Q Hi. This is Kristen Noel, and I'll be writing an article for the American Forces Press Service. And I was just wondering if you could explain to me, how do they actually locate the remains? Does the Army actually have people over in those countries working continually? If you could just tell me a little bit about how that process works.

COL. SMITH: It -- all the organizations that I've mentioned here earlier, such as DPMO, Joint Personnel, Accounting Command -- all work jointly along with the services. Records have to be researched for a particular area that they may think they have a loss. DPMO does some research. They go visit the sites there. They are interviewing personnel that may be still available. And once they have what they think is a possible site for recovery, JPAC gets the mission and JPAC goes in and actually does a review. And they have anthropologists and forensic people who go in and take a look at the site. And if they list it for excavation because they believe remains will be found there, then they'll do it then. So that's basically the system of how it works.

Q Okay. Thank you.

COL. SMITH: Okay.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Jamie?

Q Could you go into the process of how you notify family members? I mean, how do you locate -- you had mentioned that you have the two annual updates where you, you know, send out informational updates to invite people in, but how do you notify them once -- I mean, how do you gather that database?

COL. SMITH: Would you like to answer that, Linda?

MS. BAUBLITZ: Yeah. I can do it for her.

I guess our outreach program that we do is mainly for the Korean War right now. And we basically try to find the families any way we can. We find them on our own, but our 1-800 number is on a couple of websites -- Korean War Project being one of them. We have genealogists helping us, both amateur and those under contract with us. And lot of veterans and veterans' organizations have gotten involved and are helping us, too, to locate the families. And that's basically what we do. We're trying to find over 6,300 Army families, and we basically gather family history from them so we know who's still surviving and of course try to find the eligible donors for the mitochondrial

DNA, which they have to have the same maternal line. So we basically just do an outreach program and try to get DNA on file for as many of the soldiers as we can.

Q Okay. And how much feedback do you get actually coming through the 1-800 number? I mean, is that the majority of the information that you're gathering -- and people calling in?

MS. BAUBLITZ: You mean from the Internet?

Q Yeah. How does -- how much -- how many people can you -- have you identified through, you know, calls in to the 1-800 number?

MS. BAUBLITZ: Well, we have them all call the 1-800 number. But from the Internet, right now I think the majority of our new contacts are coming from what have been given to us by genealogists and the veterans.

Q Okay. And is this for the current conflict or just for past conflicts?

MS. BAUBLITZ: We only do past.

COL. SMITH: This is only past conflicts. Q Only past. Okay. Got it. Okay, thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Any other follow-ups?

Q Yeah, actually I do.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q Colonel, Andrew Lubin again. How many unidentified -- and I apologize for the phrasing -- bodies or body parts do you have on your end? Do you have anything that's not matched up down with you?

COL. SMITH: That is probably an answer -- I mean a question for the lab -- for the Joint Personnel Accounting Command, as far as what they have still in their laboratory for identification.

Q Okay.

COL. SMITH: I wouldn't even hesitate a guess to say at this point in time.

Q Okay. I'm doing an article for -- I'll write this probably over the weekend for Monday, so if you could get that to Mr. Holt sometime I'd appreciate it.

COL. SMITH: What I'll do is I'll talk with you offline, if that's okay.

Q Oh, sure. Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Not a problem. My number is 215-310-1752.

MS. LAWRENCE: What we present to him we're going to give to everybody.

COL. SMITH: Okay.

Q Okay.

MS. LAWRENCE: We'll pass it back through Jack. MR. HOLT: Okay.

Q Okay.

MS. LAWRENCE: This is Shari Lawrence. That's information that really should come out of the joint side of the house.

COL. SMITH: Right.

Q Okay.

MS. LAWRENCE: We don't -- we used to own the lab. We don't own the lab anymore. But we'll check on that and find out and get back to you.

Q Okay. Do you find a varying reluctance of people to get involved in way of the families you've got? I think you said 596 unidentified soldiers who were unaccounted for. Do you find that some of the people, some of the survivors might -- at this point don't want to know anymore? Have you ever run into that?

COL. SMITH: That's a very good question. And Carolyn, would you like to take a stab at that?

MS. FLOYD: Well, there are still families that don't want to be involved. But on the majority, most of our families are pretty interested in what we're doing. And you know, it's just that it's hard to keep in touch with them now because most of them -- some of them are now getting older, like the Korean War people family members, and World War II, and you're getting out of the line of having parents or wives, and children are coming in. So the interests sometimes is not as strong for those people that really didn't know that soldier. But on the whole, I can't say that the families are not interested. Or, you do have --

Q No, I wasn't trying to infer that they were. I was just kind of curious. You know, some people are very interested and some are not.

MS. FLOYD: Yeah, well, you know, that's -- it just depends on how well that person or how close that person was to that soldier.

MS. LAWRENCE: And they're always surprised.

MS. FLOYD: And yeah, they really are always surprised. So I would not say that they're not interested.

Q Okay, great. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Anything else?

Q Yes, Jack. This is Kristy. I have one more question. MR. HOLT: Sure.

Q I was just curious, in the write-up you provided about your organization's mission you mentioned that you also work on passing legislation.

I was wondering if you could talk a little more about that aspect of your mission and maybe give some of examples.

COL. SMITH: Passing legislation -- I don't think I put it in -- that must be someone else you're speaking about. (Laughs.)

Q Oh. It was in the -- we got a little write-up about your mission as background information.

COL. SMITH: I can tell you this: We currently are in the process of policies being addressed -- joint policies -- this recovery mission.

Q Okay.

COL. SMITH: And those are being worked at levels above our mission -- portion of the mission. I really don't -- I really can't say very much at this time about that.

Q Okay.

COL. SMITH: Okay?

MS. LAWRENCE: This is Shari Lawrence again. Before anybody gets offline, are you guys -- we've been throwing around mitochondrial DNA. Is everybody familiar with what that is?

Q Familiar enough, thanks.

MS. LAWRENCE: Pardon?

Q Familiar enough.

MS. LAWRENCE: Oh, okay.

Q I'd like to know. (Laughter.)

MS. LAWRENCE: I mean, we've been throwing it around. I just want to make sure everybody has a clue what we're talking about. (Laughs.)

Q Yeah, I think that would be helpful. (Laughs.)

MS. LAWRENCE: Okay.

MS. BAUBLITZ: This is Linda Baublitz again. Basically it is a source of DNA that is only passed through the maternal line. And for these older cases -- you know, the prior conflicts, what they are bringing back are skeletal remains. And I work in the Korea section, so obviously these losses -- since 1953, so you're talking, what, 55 years ago? And if there's any DNA left in those remains, it's the mitochondrial DNA. And so that's why we -- when we locate the families, we have to find eligible donors that have the same maternal line as the soldier. So that would be like any siblings -- even half- siblings as long as they have the same mother; it could be children of eligible sisters. In some cases we've had to go up through the mother's maternal line, like her -- the mother's sisters' children, so you're getting into the soldier's maternal cousins. And we basically now get it via an oral swab kit that we FedEx to the donor.



Q Okay. So it has to go through the maternal line.

MS. BAUBLITZ: To be eligible, yes. It has to be a maternal line because when they take the DNA from the remains to sequence and compare against the database that has the family member samples, it's going to be mitochondria DNA because nuclear DNA leaves the remains pretty -- the body pretty quickly after death.

MR. HOLT: Okay. All right. Anything else?

Colonel Smith, do you have any closing comments for us?

COL. SMITH: We appreciate you giving us the opportunity. But I'm getting a -- one of those little signs from my staff here to mention to everyone that we currently have no outreach program for World War II. And that is a case-by-case basis is how we're dealing with World War II. So I just wanted to make sure that was understood. The outreach programs primarily are just the Korea War.

MR. HOLT: Okay. All right, sir. Well, thank you very much for joining us for the Bloggers Roundtable today. Lieutenant Colonel Julius Smith, who is the chief of the Past Conflicts Repatriation Branch for the Army's Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operations out in -- here in Alexandria, Virginia.

Thank you very much for being with us, sir, and look forward to speaking with you again and some more information.

COL. SMITH: Thank you very much.

Q Colonel, thank you for the time today. Appreciate it.

Q Thanks so much.

MS. LAWRENCE: Thank you. Take care.

END.